

STRATEGY 4: ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS AND “LOCAL MARKET PLACES”

The market exchange of water to increase stream flows is limited despite strong interest and support by local, state, federal, tribal and private entities in using market-based incentives to find water. One of the most challenging tasks in acquiring water rights to improve stream flows is finding willing sellers. Many potential participants are uninformed about the problem, have concerns about the long-term impacts of transferring water out of agriculture or other industrial uses, and generally mistrust both instream flow transfer activities and governmental-run water markets. The key to overcoming barriers such as mistrust, lack of awareness and uncertainty is to:

- **Broaden public and media understanding** surrounding the need to increase and/or maintain adequate stream flows for fish in the most critical creeks, streams and rivers.
- **Raise overall awareness** about the Washington Water Acquisition Program and increase water-right holder participation in the initiative.
- **Build partnerships with public and private organizations** to expand participation in the Washington Water Acquisition Program.
- **Establish an active community presence** to promote the establishment of a “local market place.”

To accomplish the above objectives Ecology will collaborate with public and private organizations engaged in water acquisitions. Ecology recognizes that different organizations, such as Washington Water Trust, Walla Walla Watershed Alliance and county conservation districts bring certain strengths and expertise to the effort. Also each organization is best suited to certain roles and tasks in the overall collaboration. In order to maximize strengths and expertise and to minimize duplicative efforts several of the activities described below will be carried out by others either under contract or by mutual understanding.

To effectively broaden public understanding of water acquisition program and find willing participants in the program efforts must focus on the messages and messengers, ensuring active participation by stakeholders, tailoring information, supporting partners and soliciting continuous feedback.

1. Key messages:

- Current water withdrawals, impoundments and land use changes have resulted in extreme low flows in many state rivers, creeks and streams throughout Washington.
- Low flows become an acute problem in late summer and early fall when important fish species need adequate water for migration, spawning and rearing– the same time water use by agriculture and people is also at its height.
- Low summer flows raise water temperatures and concentrate pollutants that can sicken or kill fish. Some creeks and rivers even dry up completely.
- To help increase and/or maintain adequate stream flows, Ecology and other entities have launched the Washington Water Acquisition Program.

- The program is targeting 16 critical watersheds where fish populations are threatened because of extremely low stream flows.
- Participation in the program is completely voluntary. The more water holders participate, however, the likelihood is greatly that fish habitat and productivity will improve and federal intervention may diminish under the Endangered Species Act.
- Water right purchases, long-term leases and dry-year leases are considered the most important and effective way to put water where and when it is most needed.
- All water sold, leased or donated through the Washington Water Acquisition Program will be held in trust and returned to targeted streams, rivers, creeks and reaches.
- Water right leases and donations retain the seniority of the original rights and are not subject to relinquishment while in trust. Donated rights may qualify as a deduction for charitable contributions on federal income taxes.
- Washington state agencies (departments of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife, Conservation Commission, etc.) are working in partnership with local water and land conservation organizations, conservation districts, irrigation associations, agricultural interests and tribes to identify potential water-right donors and sellers.
- The agency will work with individual water-right holders to help ensure any purchase, or lease receives fair-market value.

2. Identifying partners and resources

Staff will gather information about each critical basin in order to identify key contacts and primary issues and barriers for program success. This includes:

- Working with individual Ecology watershed leads.
- Working with Ecology and Fish and Wildlife field staff, especially those involved in previous lease or trust agreements.
- Identifying and communicate with key local community leaders within each critical basin.
- Identifying and contact previous lease or trust participants.

3. Meet with local groups and organizations in their communities

Examples include:

- Watershed planning units and when applicable Local Entities (within the 16 critical basins).
- Local conservation districts (within the 16 critical basins).
- Local Washington State University Cooperative Extension offices (within the 16 critical basins).
- Other applicable local interests (irrigation, farming and business entities, tribes, environmental groups, etc).

4. Produce outreach materials:

- Brochures, fact sheet tailored for individual watersheds.
- Presentations targeted to specific audiences.
- A web page with links.
- Press releases when needed.

5. Develop partnerships with other entities engaged in water acquisition

These include activities such as:

- Developing and executing agreements with Washington Water Trust, Walla Walla Watershed Alliance, BPA, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to engage in a large-scale outreach and water rights transactions efforts.
- Working collaboratively with conservation districts, irrigation districts and others to craft and implement outreach strategies on specific issues and for specific watersheds.
- Giving presentations and training to various partners.
- Co-sponsoring open houses and face-to-face meetings.
- Meeting with local media, including editorial boards, radio stations, etc.

6. Evaluate public acceptance of the program

These activities, which may be contracted out, involve:

- Developing a basic interview survey and contact list.
- Identifying and interviewing sellers and leasers, trust participants, key local community leaders and others.
- Compiling results and identifying what works as well as needed changes.